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Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women: implementation of strategic objectives and action in the critical areas of concern

Revised draft agreed conclusions on institutional mechanisms, submitted by the Vice-Chairperson of the Commission, Nonhlanhla P. L. Mlangeni (Swaziland)

The Commission on the Status of Women

1. *Reaffirms* the Beijing Platform for Action, adopted by the Fourth World Conference on Women,[1] notably chapter IV.H on institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women[2] and Economic and Social Council agreed conclusions 1997/2 on mainstreaming the gender perspective into all policies and programmes in the United Nations system;[3]

2. *Recognizes* that the effectiveness and sustainability of national machineries are highly dependent on their embeddedness in the national context, the political and socio-economic system and the needs of and accountability to women, including those with the least access to resources; in addition, recognizes that sharing information at the regional and international levels is crucial for strengthening national machineries and other related institutional mechanisms; that gender equality is advanced through the promotion and protection of all human rights and fundamental freedoms, respect for democracy, peace and development; and that the full involvement of women and men is essential;

3. *Further recognizes* that gender mainstreaming is a tool for effective policy-making at all levels and not a substitute for targeted, women-specific policies and programmes, equality legislation, national machineries for the advancement of women and the establishment of gender focal points;

[1] Report of the *Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing, 4–15 September 1995* (A/CONF.177/20/Rev.1), chap. I, resolution 1, annex II.

[2] General Assembly resolution 34/180, annex.

[3] See A/52/3, chap. IV, sect. A, para. 4.

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4. *Acknowledges* that national machineries are necessary for the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action; and that for national machineries to be effective, clear mandates, location at the highest possible level, accountability mechanisms, partnership with civil society, a transparent political process, adequate financial and human resources and continued strong political commitment are crucial;

5. *Stresses* the importance of international cooperation in order to assist the work of national mechanisms in all countries especially developing countries;

6. *Welcomes* Economic and Social Council decision 1998/298, by which the Council decided to devote the high-level segment of its 1999 substantive session to the advancement of women;

7. *Proposes*, in order to accelerate the implementation of the strategic objectives of chapter IV.H of the Beijing Platform for Action, that the following action be taken:

Actions by Governments, national machineries and other institutional mechanisms, and the international community, including the United Nations system, for the advancement of women and for gender equality

A. Actions to be taken by Governments

(a) Provide continued strong political commitment to supporting the strengthening of national machineries and the advancement of women;

(b) Ensure that national machineries are placed at the highest possible level of government and all institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women are invested with the authority needed to fulfil their mandated roles and responsibilities;

(c) Provide adequate and sustainable financial and human resources to national machineries and other institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women through national budgets, while also granting national machinery the possibility of attracting funds from other bodies for the purpose of specific projects;

(d) Structure appropriately the functions of national machineries at all levels in order to ensure effectiveness in gender mainstreaming;

(e) Ensure that mainstreaming a gender perspective is fully understood, institutionalized and implemented. These efforts should include promoting awareness and understanding of the Platform for Action;

(f) Continue to take steps to ensure that the integration of a gender perspective in the mainstream of all government activities is part of a dual and complementary strategy to achieve gender equality. This includes a continuing need for targeted priorities, policies, programmes and positive action measures;

(g) Ensure that senior management in each ministry or agency takes responsibility for fulfilling gender equality commitments and integrating a gender perspective in all activities, and that appropriate assistance from gender experts or gender focal points is available;

(h) Ensure that senior management in each ministry or agency takes the responsibility for guaranteeing that the goal of gender equality is pursued, that a gender perspective is integrated in all activities and that senior managers get appropriate assistance from gender experts or gender focal points;

(i) Promote and ensure, as appropriate, the establishment of effective gender focal points at all decision-making levels and in all ministries and other decision-making bodies, develop close collaboration among them and create follow-up mechanisms;

(j) Create and/or encourage the creation and strengthening of institutional mechanisms at all levels, including taking all measures to ensure that national machineries as well as focal points within specific institutions are not marginalized in the administrative structure but supported at the highest possible level of government and entrusted with clearly defined mandates which define their function as a policy advisory body;

(k) Promote capacity-building including gender training for both women and men in government ministries so as to be more responsive to the needs and interests of women and gender equality, and develop their own capacity by making use of available national and international models and methodologies in the field of gender equality;

(l) Promote, where appropriate, and ensure accountability and transparency of government through effective monitoring mechanisms and tools such as gender-disaggregated statistics, gender budgeting, gender auditing and gender impact assessment, based on established benchmarks, and other performance indicators and regular public reporting, including under international agreements;

(m) Provide assistance, as appropriate, to agencies including those outside government in formulating gender-sensitive performance indicators, necessary to measure and review progress made in the field of gender equality, including the advancement of women and gender mainstreaming;

(n) Continuously improve the gathering and disaggregation of data and the development of statistics and indicators in all critical areas of the Platform for Action for use in analysis, policy development and planning;

(o) Give visibility to the relationship between remunerated and unremunerated work and its importance to gender analysis, and promote greater understanding among relevant ministries and organizations by developing methods for assessing its value in quantitative terms in order to develop appropriate policies in this respect;

(p) Recognize and acknowledge that unremunerated work by women in, for example agriculture, food production, natural resources management, caring for dependants and household and voluntary work, is a considerable contribution to society. Develop and improve mechanisms, for example time-use studies, to measure in quantitative terms unremunerated work in order to:

- Make visible the unequal distribution between women and men of remunerated and unremunerated work in order to promote changes;
- Assess the real value of unremunerated work and accurately reflect it in satellite or other official accounts that are separate from but consistent with core national accounts;

(q) Strengthen the relations among civil society, all governmental agencies and national machineries;

(r) Ensure that the needs, rights and interests of all women, including those who are not members of organizations, and live in poverty in rural and urban areas, are identified and mainstreamed into policy and programme development. This should be done in ways that value the diversity of women and recognize the barriers many women face that prohibit and prevent their participation in public policy development;

(s) Respect the involvement of non-governmental organizations in assisting Governments in the implementation of regional, national and international commitments through advocacy and raising awareness of gender equality issues. Women should be actively involved in the implementation and monitoring of the Platform for Action;

(t) Coordinate or consult with, as appropriate, non-governmental organizations and civil society in national and international activities including elaborating national action plans, preparing reports to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women and implementing the Platform for Action;

(u) Ensure transparency through open and participatory dialogue and the promotion of balanced participation of women and men in all areas of decision-making;

(v) Support autonomous organizations and institutions involved in research, analysis and evaluation of activities on gender issues and use the results to influence the transformation of policies and programmes;

(w) Create clear anti-discrimination regulations with adequate mechanisms, including a proper legal framework for addressing violations;

(x) Initiate, where necessary, gender equality legislation and create or strengthen, where appropriate, independent bodies, such as the ombudsperson and equal opportunity commission, with responsibility and authority for *inter alia*, promoting and ensuring compliance with gender equality legislation;

(y) Involve parliaments and, wherever appropriate, the judiciary in monitoring progress in gender mainstreaming and strengthening gender-related aspects of all government reporting, and ensure transparency through open and participatory dialogue and the promotion of balanced participation of women and men in all areas and at all levels of decision-making.

B. Actions to be taken by national machineries and other institutional mechanisms

(a) Design, promote the implementation of, execute, monitor, evaluate and mobilize support for policies that promote the advancement of women and advocate gender equality and promote public debate;

(b) Act as catalysts for gender mainstreaming in all policies and programmes and not necessarily as agents for policy implementation. However, national machineries are partners in policy formulation and may also choose to implement and coordinate specific projects;

(c) Assist other parts of Government in taking specific actions in the gathering and disaggregation of data and the development of statistics and indicators in all critical areas of the Platform for Action for use in analysis, policy development, planning and programming;

(d) Promote research and dissemination of research findings and information on women and gender equality, including disparities of income and workload between women and men and, where appropriate, among women;

(e) Take specific actions, *inter alia*, the establishment of documentation centres, to disseminate gender-relevant data and other information, including on the important contribution of women to society and research results in easily accessible formats and places in order to promote more informed public dialogue, including through the media, on gender equality and issues pertinent to the advancement of women;

(f) Ensure the ongoing training on gender issues, at all levels, of the personnel of the national machineries to promote programme and policy sustainability;

(g) Develop, as appropriate, policies to recruit technical staff with expertise in gender equality issues;

(h) Create or strengthen collaborative links with other agencies at local, regional, national and international levels;

(i) Recognize civil society as an important source of support and legitimacy and therefore create and strengthen the relationship with civil society through regular consultations with non-governmental organizations, the research community, social partners and other concerned groups. This will create a strong basis for gender-sensitive policy and the advancement of women;

(j) Establish partnerships, liaise and consult with women's organizations, non-governmental organizations, academic institutions, the media and other agencies on national and international policies relating to women and gender and inform them of the international commitments of their Governments;

(k) Engage the media in dialogue aimed at re-examining gender stereotypes and negative portrayal of both women and men;

(l) Create and strengthen collaborative relationships with the private sector, including through initiating advocacy dialogue and advising private companies to address the issues affecting women in the paid labour force, and set up ways and means to promote equality of women and men.

C. Actions to be taken by the international community, including the United Nations system

(a) Implement Economic and Social Council agreed conclusions 1997/2;[3]

(b) Implement fully the revised system-wide medium-term plan for the advancement of women (1996–2001);

(c) Ensure that individual managers are held accountable for implementing the strategic plan of action for the improvement of the status of women in the Secretariat (1995–2000) within their areas of responsibility, and that heads of departments and offices develop gender action plans which establish concrete strategies for the achievement of gender balance in individual departments and offices, with full respect for the principle of equitable geographical distribution and in conformity with Article 101 of the Charter of the United Nations, so as to ensure, as far as possible, that the appointment and promotion of women will not be less than 50 per cent, until the goal of 50/50 gender distribution is met;

(d) Request the Administrative Committee on Coordination Inter-Agency Committee on Women and Gender Equality to continue its work to implement the Beijing Platform for Action and to promote the integration of a gender perspective in the implementation and follow-up to major United Nations conferences and summits;

(e) Support the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, including through support for the important activities of the United Nations Development Fund for Women and the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women in the fulfilment of their respective mandates;

(f) Support national Governments in their efforts to strengthen national mechanisms through official development assistance (ODA) and other appropriate assistance;

(g) Encourage multilateral, bilateral, donor and development agencies to include in their programmes of assistance, activities that strengthen national machineries;

(h) Encourage Governments and national machineries to undertake wide consultations with their civil societies when providing information on gender and women's issues to relevant international bodies;

(i) Document and publish "good practices", and provide logistical support and ensure equal access to information technology wherever appropriate. In this regard, the offices of United Nations resident coordinators, in particular the women in development programmes and gender units, should play a critical role;

(j) Develop and disseminate gender-disaggregated data and qualitative performance indicators to ensure effective gender-sensitive planning, monitoring, evaluation and implementation of programmes;

(k) Encourage multilateral development institutions, bilateral donors, and international non-governmental organizations to make available methodology already developed on the collection and analysis of gender-disaggregated data measurement and valuation of unwaged work and to provide technical assistance and other resources, including financial resources as appropriate, to developing countries and countries with economies in transition;

(l) In order to elaborate a systematic and comprehensive approach to information on unremunerated work, the Division of the Advancement of Women of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat should prepare and circulate among all States a detailed and well-structured questionnaire. The questionnaire should seek inputs on developments in measuring and valuing unremunerated work and on policies and programmes as well as laws that recognize and address such work;

(m) Request the Division for the Advancement of Women to expand the Directory of National Machineries, by including, for example, mandates, number of staff, e-mail addresses, fax numbers and working-level contacts, so that this comprehensive information can facilitate better communication among national machineries around the world.